IN THE CLAIMS:

Please amend the claims as follows:

1. (Currently Amended) A method for generating and accessing usage measurements data associated with signaling messages routed or processed by a signaling message routing node in a communications network, the method comprising:

(a) receiving[[,]] a signaling message at a communication link module (CLM) located within a signaling message routing node for routing signaling messages between other nodes in a communications network, ~~a signaling message~~;

(b) generating and storing first peg count information on the CLM based on information contained within the signaling message;

(c) from a first usage measurements module (UMM) within the signaling message routing node, polling the CLM to request the first peg count information;

(d) in response to the polling ~~the CLM~~, sending the first peg count information to ~~a usage measurements module (UMM)~~ the first UMM; and

(e) communicating the first peg count information from the first UMM to an ~~external~~ application located on a general-purpose computing platform external to the signaling message routing node via an IP communication link.

2. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1 wherein the CLM [[is]] comprises a time division multiplexed (TDM)-based signaling link interface module.

3. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1 wherein the CLM [[is]] comprises an asynchronous transfer mode (ATM)-based signaling link interface module.

4. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1 wherein the CLM [[is]] comprises an ~~IP-based~~ IP-based signaling link interface module.

5. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein storing first peg count information on the CLM includes storing information in random access memory (RAM).

6. (Original) The method of claim 1 comprising storing the first peg count information on a disk storage medium.

7. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1 wherein generating first peg count information includes generating the first peg count information based on at least one of an origination point code (OPC) value, a destination point code (DPC) value, a called party address (CdPA) value, and a calling party address (CgPA) contained in the signaling message ~~packet~~.

8. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1 wherein sending the first peg count information to [[a]] the first UMM includes sending the first peg count information to the first UMM via a communication bus that connects the CLM and the first UMM.

9. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1 comprising forwarding the first peg count information from the first UMM to an operations, administration, and maintenance module internal to the signaling message routing node.

10. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1 comprising routing the signaling message from the CLM to an internal processing module (IPM) within the signaling message routing node.

11. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 10 comprising:

(a) receiving the signaling message [[packet]] at the IPM;

(b) generating and storing second peg count information on the IPM;

(c) from the first UMM, polling the IPM to request the second peg count information;

(d) in response to the polling ~~the IPM~~, sending the second peg count information to the first UMM; and

(e) communicating the second peg count information from the first UMM to the general-purpose computing platform via the IP communication link.

12. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 11 comprising performing SCCP/TCAP processing on the [[first]] signaling message at the IPM.

13. (Original) The method of claim 12 wherein the SCCP/TCAP processing includes number portability processing and the second peg count information relates to the number portability processing.

14. (Original) The method of claim 12 wherein the SCCP/TCAP processing includes global title translation (GTT) processing and the second peg count information relates to the GTT processing.

15. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 12 comprising, at the IPM, performing triggerless number portability processing on the signaling

message[[,]] and wherein the second peg count information relates to the triggerless LNP processing.

16. (Original) The method of claim 12 comprising, at the IPM, performing intelligent network (IN) processing on the signaling message and wherein the second peg count information relates to the IN processing.

17. (Original) The method of claim 12 comprising, at the IPM, performing TCAP processing on the signaling message, and wherein the second peg count information relates to the TCAP processing.

18. (Currently Amended) A method for load sharing between usage measurements modules within a routing node, the method comprising:

(a) maintaining, at a primary usage measurements module, a master query list including queries for usage measurements or peg count information;

(b) distributing a portion of the master query list to at least one secondary usage measurements module;

(c) forwarding queries from the primary and secondary usage measurements modules to internal processing modules within the routing node;

(d) receiving usage measurements in response to the ~~query messages~~ queries; and

(e) aggregating the usage measurements at the primary usage measurements module.

19. (Original) The method of claim 18 comprising forwarding the aggregated query messages from the primary usage measurements module to an external message processing platform via a high speed communications link.

20. (Original) The method of claim 18 comprising, at the primary usage measurements module, monitoring the status of secondary usage measurements modules, and, in response to detecting failure of one of the secondary usage measurements modules, re-allocating portions of the master query list.

21. (Original) The method of claim 18 comprising, at the secondary usage measurements module, monitoring the status of the primary usage measurements module, and, in response to detecting failure of the primary usage measurements module, assuming the role of the primary usage measurements module.

22. (Currently Amended) A system for generating and accessing usage measurements associated with signaling message packets routed through a packet routing node in a communications network, the system comprising:

a signaling message routing node for routing signaling messages between other nodes in a communications network, the signaling message routing node including:

(a) a communication link module (CLM) located within the signaling message routing node and being adapted to receive a signaling

message[[,]] and to generate and store first peg count information based on information contained within the signaling message; and

(b) a first usage measurements module (UMM) located within the signaling message routing node and for polling the CLM, receiving the first peg count information from the CLM, and for communicating the first peg count information to external devices over a high-speed communication link.

23. (Currently Amended) The system of claim 22 wherein the CLM [[is]] comprises a signaling system 7 signaling link interface module (LIM).

24. (Currently Amended) The system of claim 22 wherein the CLM [[is]] comprises an IP capable data communications module (DCM).

25. (Original) The system of claim 22 wherein the CLM includes random access memory (RAM) for temporarily storing the first peg count information.

26. (Original) The system of claim 22 wherein the communication link module includes a plurality of layers and each layer generates peg counts for received messages.

27. (Original) The system of claim 22 wherein the first usage measurements module includes:

(a) a poller for polling the communications link module to obtain the first peg count information;

(b) an entity collection controller for controlling the poller;

(c) a measurement report controller for generating reports based on the first peg count information; and

(d) a file transfer application for sending the reports to external devices over the high speed communication link.

28. (Original) The system of claim 22 comprising a disk storage device operatively associated with the first UMM for storing the first peg count information.

29. (Currently Amended) The system of claim 22 wherein the first peg count information is based on at least one of an origination point code (OPC) value, a destination point code (DPC) value, a called party address (CdPA) value, and a calling party address (CgPA) value contained in the signaling message ~~packet~~.

30. (Original) The system of claim 22 wherein the CLM is adapted to send the first peg count information to the first UMM via a communication bus that connects the CLM and the first UMM.

31. (Original) The system of claim 22 comprising an internal processing module (IPM) for performing internal processing operations on received signaling messages and for generating second peg count information based on the processing operations.

32. (Original) The system of claim 31 wherein the first UMM is adapted to poll the IPM and receive the second peg count information from the IPM.

33. (Original) The system of claim 31 wherein the IPM includes a signaling connection control part/transaction capabilities application part (SCCP/TCAP)

processing module and the second peg count information relates to SCCP/TCAP messages.

34. (Original) The system of claim 33 wherein the SCCP/TCAP processing module includes a number portability processor and the second peg count information relates to number portability queries or responses.

35. (Original) The system of claim 33 wherein the SCCP/TCAP processing module includes a global title translation (GTT) processor and the second peg count information relates to global title translations.

36. (Original) The system of claim 22 comprising a general-purpose computer coupled to first UMM via the high speed link for receiving the first peg count information.

37. (Original) The system of claim 22 comprising at least one second UMM for polling the communications link module for peg count information.

38. (Original) The system of claim 37 wherein the first UMM is adapted to control peg count collection by the second UMM.

39. (Original) The system of claim 38 wherein the first UMM maintains a master query list and distributes a portion of the master query list to the second UMM to control peg count collection by the second UMM.

40. (Original) The system of claim 22 wherein the first UMM includes a report generator for generating user-configurable reports in response to user-specified parameters.

41. (Currently Amended) A peg count collection system comprising:

(a) a signaling ~~gateway~~ message routing node for routing signaling messages between other nodes in a communications network and including a plurality of ~~first internal~~ processing modules located within the signaling message routing node for generating peg count information based on received or processed signaling messages and a first usage ~~second internal processing~~ measurements module for polling the first internal processing modules to obtain the peg count information and for forwarding the peg count information to an external device via a TCP/IP connection; and

(b) a ~~general-purpose~~ general-purpose computing platform external to the signaling ~~gateway~~ message routing node for receiving the peg count information via the TCP/IP connection and for processing the peg count information.

42. (Currently Amended) The system of claim 41 wherein the ~~general-purpose~~ general-purpose computing platform includes a billing application for generating bills based on the peg count information.

43. (Currently Amended) The system of claim 41 wherein the ~~general-purpose~~ general-purpose computing platform includes a billing verification application for verifying bills for telecommunications services based on the peg count information.

44. (Currently Amended) The system of claim 41 wherein the general-purpose computing platform includes a ~~usage measurements~~ usage measurements

application for generating usage measurement reports [[s]] based on the peg count information.

Please add the following new claims:

45. (New) The method of claim 1 comprising:

(a) receiving a plurality of signaling messages at a plurality of communication link modules within the signaling message routing node;

(b) at each of the communication link modules, generating peg counts for the signaling messages;

(c) polling the communication link modules from the first usage measurements module;

(d) forwarding the peg counts from the communication link modules to the first usage measurements module; and

(e) forwarding the peg counts from the first usage measurements module to the general-purpose computing platform via the IP communication link.

46. (New) The method of claim 45 comprising polling at least some of the communication link modules from a second usage measurements module and forwarding at least some of the peg counts to the second usage measurements module.

47. (New) The method of claim 1 wherein generating the first peg count information includes maintaining a count of a number of messages satisfying predetermined criteria.

48. (New) The system of claim 22 comprising a plurality of communication link modules located within the signaling message routing node for generating and storing peg counts and for forwarding the peg counts to the first usage measurements module in response to polling.

49. (New) The system of claim 22 wherein generating the peg count information includes maintaining counts of numbers of messages satisfying predetermined criteria.

50. (New) The system of claim 41 wherein generating the first peg count information includes maintaining a count of messages satisfying predetermined criteria.